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*WPD101 09/18/2006
 NATO's Operation Medusa Pushing Taliban from Southern Khandahar
 (Alliance paving the way for reconstruction, development, says British officer) (650)

By David McKeeby
 Washington File Staff Writer

Washington – A top NATO commander announced that the alliance's two-week offensive to push Taliban remnants from southern Afghanistan and pave the way for reconstruction and development has proven to be a "significant success."

British Lieutenant General David Richards, commander of NATO's 20,000-strong, U.N.-mandated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), said September 17 in London that the effort, code-named Operation Medusa, had sent a message to enemy forces who might have doubted the alliance's resolve as it assumed responsibility from U.S.-led coalition forces in the south on August 1.

U.S. Marine General James L. Jones, supreme commander of allied forces in Europe said in a September 17 news release that the operation proves that "NATO will not shirk from taking robust action where necessary and especially given the level of insurgent activity." (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=September&x=20060907181039sjhtrop0.8368189>).)

Troops from Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States participated in the operation.

"Six nations fought side by side to inflict significant casualties on the entrenched insurgent forces, who could have avoided this sad loss of life by reconciling with the legitimate Afghan government," provincial Governor Assadullah Khalid said September 17 in Khandahar.

Approximately 8,000 alliance troops joined Afghan security forces in the operation, which featured targeted ground and air assaults in Khandahar province's southern districts of Panjwayi, Pashmul and Zhari. NATO reported 512 insurgents killed, 136 detained and an unknown number driven from the area.

As a result of the joint operation, Richards said insurgents “suffered significant casualties” and “had no choice but to leave.”

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT RECOVERY

Having created a secure environment in the area, Richards said, the alliance will help local leaders begin the long process of rebuilding their communities. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=August&x=20060817170247MVyelwarC0.28706>).)

In the days and weeks ahead, he said, “you will see a great effort going into this area, both in short-term support and longer-term development.”

Thousands of area residents fled the region during the fighting, which caused significant damage to several communities. NATO combat engineers now are sweeping the area for land mines and other dangerous traps left behind by Taliban forces so families can return and start repairing their homes and farms. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=August&x=20060830164954mlenuhret0.8767359>).)

An emergency response committee that includes representatives from the United Nations, NATO's provincial reconstruction teams and the Afghan government currently is surveying the damage to roughly 18,000 households.

“We are clearing the area of bombs and landmines in order to facilitate the complete and safe return of the displaced families,” Khalid said, adding that he hoped the process would be completed before the holy month of Ramadan, which begins September 24.

This is the first step toward stabilization, he said. Short-term humanitarian aid deliveries for returning families will follow and gradually international advisers will help local leaders to define and implement long-term reconstruction and development plans.

“Just as the brave soldiers of ISAF and the Afghan National Army demonstrated their will to succeed, I do not doubt that the nations represented here will go the next step and deliver the tangible evidence of our intent to move forward to stabilization and reconstruction,” Jones said.

Although winter typically has brought with it a lull in insurgent activities, NATO officials caution that the militants continually are adapting their tactics, as seen in a pair of suicide attacks against Canadian forces in the area in mid-September.

But wherever the enemy surfaces in Khandahar province, Khalid pledged, “the Afghan National Army, the Afghan Nation Police and NATO forces will deal to them a crushing defeat.”

The full text (<http://www.nato.int/shape/news/2006/09/060917a.htm>) of the press release on Operation Medusa is available from the NATO Web site.

For more information see Rebuilding Afghanistan (http://usinfo.state.gov/sa/rebuilding_afghanistan.html).

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*WPD102 09/18/2006
NATO Foreign Ministers To Meet During U.N. General Assembly

(New York site of final high-level gathering before the Riga summit in November) (570)

By Vince Crawley
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- NATO's foreign ministers plan to meet September 21 on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly in New York for their final high-level talks before the NATO summit in November in Latvia.

The 90-minute meeting – brief by NATO standards – is viewed as a “short, to the point” business meeting to discuss major political issues, an alliance official said. Military matters are scheduled for discussion in a separate informal meeting of NATO defense ministers September 28-30 in Portorož, Slovenia.

NATO heads of state are scheduled to meet November 28-29 in Riga, Latvia, to discuss a “transformation” agenda aimed at helping the alliance better undertake global missions of the 21st century. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=July&x=20060725124550MVyelwarC0.3291284>).)

The 61st annual U.N. General Assembly starts September 19, with weeklong debates among heads of state and other global leaders. NATO ordinarily does not meet on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly. However, NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer asked for the meeting because the U.N. meeting will be the last time before the Riga summit that all NATO foreign ministers are scheduled to be in one place, the alliance official said. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=September&x=20060912190452esnamfuak0.2124292>).)

Topics to be discussed by the NATO foreign ministers include Afghanistan, which is viewed as NATO's top-priority mission in 2006, as well as enlargement issues, partnership issues, contact countries and the Middle East training initiative.

On the subject of enlarging NATO, the November summit in Riga is not expected to offer membership to any candidate countries, but the foreign ministers might discuss what kind of message they want to send to the three participants in the NATO Membership Action Plan: Albania, Croatia and the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia. The Riga summit will be an opportunity to signal what conditions should be met for the candidate countries to be offered membership as early as 2008. Also, the republic of Georgia has requested a formal intensified dialogue that could lead to NATO membership. Ukraine already has begun an intensified dialogue.

Regarding partnerships, NATO wants to improve the effectiveness of its Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), a cooperative forum for the 26 NATO nations and 20 nonmember nations. NATO also wants to look at ways to improve the Partnership for Peace (PFP) program, which offers assistance in military and political reforms for nations that either seek NATO membership or want to cooperate more closely with the alliance. Bosnia, Montenegro and Serbia are all interested in joining PFP.

In addition, NATO wants to coordinate better with so-called “contact countries” such as Australia, Japan and South Korea. These nations participate in global missions but have no regional interest in joining NATO.

Finally, on the Middle East training initiative, the government of Jordan has said it is interested in discussing a NATO pilot program to conduct academic training in the Middle East. Other nations in the region also might participate. The NATO Middle East training center would train military and civilian officials of nations in the Mediterranean region, the Middle East and the Gulf. NATO currently hosts a multinational training facility in southern Germany.

For additional information on the 61st Session of the U.N. General Assembly, see The United States and the United Nations (http://usinfo.state.gov/is/international_security/UNGA_2005.html).

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*WPD103 09/18/2006

Bush Plans To Focus on Mideast Democracy at United Nations
(President will address 61st session of U.N. General Assembly) (700)

By Judy Aita
Washington File United Nations Correspondent

United Nations -- While he is in New York for the opening of the 61st U.N. General Assembly, President Bush will focus on his "freedom agenda," especially his positive vision for the Middle East, in both his speech to the assembly and during private meetings, according to senior administration officials.

"Because they know that freedom will defeat them, terrorists, tyrants and traitors to humanity are doing all they can to stop the expansion of freedom. The Middle East is the central battleground. The bright, democratic future that we see for the Middle East [is] in contra-distinction to some who have almost a backward looking vision for that region," a senior official who asked not to be identified told reporters September 15 via teleconference.

In his speech to the General Assembly September 19, Bush plans to emphasize the need to work with democratically elected governments such as those in Lebanon and Iraq to help strengthen their democratic institutions as well as help people in other countries achieve their freedom, the officials said. The president will be urging the international community to help those in the Middle East to realize that desire for freedom.

The freedom agenda is not for the Middle East alone, although the region -- particularly in Iraq, Lebanon and the Palestinian Territories -- is the main battleground in the struggle for democracy at this time, the officials said.

The president will have "in each case -- Iraq, Lebanon and the Palestinian Authority . . . very concrete suggestions about the path forward for realizing his vision of freedom and the role that the international community can play in that," one administration official said.

Iran also will be addressed in the president's speech. The Iranian people have the potential to be part of Bush's positive vision for the region, the officials said.

Bush will not be meeting with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who also will address the General Assembly on September 19. Iran's uranium enrichment program and its refusal to meet the Security Council's August 31 deadline to halt enrichment is expected to be a key topic during the assembly.

"We don't have contacts with the Iranians, and we're not going to have it, unless and until they suspend their enrichment-related activities," one official said.

MEETINGS SCHEDULED WITH LEADERS OF OTHER DEMOCRACIES

Even though military and police efforts are needed to combat terrorists, the ultimate weapons in the War on Terror are justice, freedom and opportunity -- topics that will be discussed in the president's private meetings September 18 with Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi of Malaysia, President Antonio Saca of El Salvador, President Ricardo Maduro of Honduras, President Jakaya Kikwete of Tanzania, and on September 19 with President Jalal Talabani of Iraq, the official said.

Malaysia, the official said, is a democratic country with a moderate form of Islamic government and "a very good demonstration of how Islam and democracy are fully compatible concepts."

Twenty years ago, El Salvador was torn by factional strife with insurgency, death squads and violence. Democracy seemed impossible, he said. But for the past 15 years El Salvador has been "a very successful democratic country where people who were former combatants have managed to reintegrate into what is a very prosperous, successful society."

Tanzania is "an emerging democracy in Africa, but there are serious concerns about terrorists using its terrain. So the president will engage with President Kikwete on the challenges of fighting terrorism in East Africa," the official said.

The president also will be participating in a meeting of the U.N. Democracy Fund, a group that was created in 2006 at the suggestion of President Bush to provide a way for established democracies to help new democracies and strengthen democratic institutions around the world.

The group of about 25 nations will meet for the first time with several nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) working on democracy issues such as training election observers or defending political prisoners. The group will discuss how the fund can support the work of NGOs worldwide. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=March&x=20060306181320MVyelwarC0.8435938>).)

For further information, see The United States and the United Nations (http://usinfo.state.gov/is/international_security/UNGA_2005.html).

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*WPD104 09/18/2006

Treasury Secretary Calls for More Flexible Economic Policies
(Reforms would help reduce imbalances, Paulson tells G7 ministers) (520)

By Kathryn McConnell and Carrie Loewenthal
Washington File Staff Writers

Washington -- Greater flexibility of global economic policies would help reduce economic imbalances, U.S. Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson says.

In a September 16 statement following a meeting in Singapore of finance ministers and central bankers from the seven leading industrialized nations known as the Group of Seven (G7), Paulson called on China to adopt a more flexible currency and to reform its financial sector.

He also said oil-exporting countries need to enhance their capacity to absorb investment and, in some cases, to permit greater exchange-rate flexibility.

Paulson called on Europe and Japan, which are seeing signs of moderate economic recovery, to implement economic reforms and increase growth by making possible more domestic demand for products and services.

The G7 comprises Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States. Its meeting preceded the annual meetings of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund September 19-20, also in Singapore.

In addition to saying that addressing global imbalances is a "shared responsibility" of the world's economies, Paulson said trade liberalization is important.

"Economies that are open to trade and competition benefit greatly, and economies that restrict open trade and competition impose heavy costs on themselves and the overall economy," he said.

Paulson added that ensuring the soundness and security of international financial systems, and reforming International Monetary Fund (IMF) governance and the formulas the fund uses to calculate quotas also need global attention. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=September&x=20060913131348SAikceinawz0.3942224>).)

"Reform is long overdue," he said.

In a statement following their meeting, the G7 finance ministers and central bankers endorsed making the IMF quota and voting system "more responsive to changes in global economic realities . . . and enhancing the participation and voice for low-income countries."

The quota formulas should have a "predominant weight" on countries' gross domestic product, Paulson said.

Each IMF-member country is assigned a quota, based broadly on its size in the world economy. Quotas determine a country's maximum financial commitment to the fund and its voting power, and bear on its access to IMF financing.

The finance ministers called for a "global common standard for reporting oil reserves" and greater transparency in energy-market data. They also encouraged investment in oil "exploration, production, transportation and refining capacity."

The G7 expressed support for Lebanon's reconstruction and development efforts and for the international Iraq compact, designed to give international political and financial support for the Iraqi government, and agreed to keep under review "economic prospects" in the West Bank and Gaza.

G7 members agreed to intensify their efforts to combat money laundering and financing of weapons proliferation and terrorist networks, and urged the IMF and the World Bank to work closely with the inter-governmental Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to implement relevant international financial standards.

The full text (<http://www.treasury.gov/press/releases/hp99.htm>) of Paulson's statement as prepared for delivery is available on the Treasury Department Web site. The full text (<http://www.g7.utoronto.ca/finance/fm060916.htm>) September 16 G7 statement is available on the University of Toronto G8 Information Center Web site.

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>)

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*WPD105 09/18/2006

Burma, Venezuela "Failed Demonstrably" in Anti-drug Efforts

(Annual finding by White House puts 20 nations on list of major drug producers) (770)

By Charlene Porter

Washington File Staff Writer

Washington – An annual world survey of governments' anti-drug efforts concludes that Burma and Venezuela have "failed demonstrably" to enact counternarcotics-trafficking strategies in keeping with international agreements, according to a determination issued by the White House September 18.

For the second year in a row, these two nations have been so designated among 20 nations identified as major drug-transit or major illicit drug-producing countries.

Briefing reporters on the White House decisions, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) Christy McCampbell said Burma is considered a failure because it has not taken strong action against drug gangs, and its actions against methamphetamine are unsatisfactory.

"Burma's performance is also lackluster in the areas of demand reduction, interdiction, anti-money laundering and combating corruption," McCampbell said of the Southeast Asian nation considered the world's second-largest producer of opium poppy after Afghanistan.

Under U.S. law, the designation of demonstrable failure in this assessment means that a country can be found ineligible for U.S. assistance, though assistance usually is preserved for humanitarian and countertrafficking activities.

The 20 countries on what is known as "the majors" list are Afghanistan, Bahamas, Bolivia, Brazil, Burma, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, India, Jamaica, Laos, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Venezuela.

The list of countries and those designated to have failed in their commitments in countertrafficking are identical to the findings delivered to Congress in September 2005. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2005&m=September&x=20050916175617AJatiA0.7502863&t=xarchives/xarchitem.html>).)

WESTERN HEMISPHERE

The presidential finding does not call for full sanctions to be levied in response to Venezuela's weak drug-fighting record, because "support for programs to Venezuela's democratic institutions is vital to the national interests of the United States," according to the determination memorandum sent from the president to the secretary of state.

McCampbell said Venezuelan authorities had turned in a "poor performance" in cooperating with their neighbors in anti-trafficking activities at a time of "soaring drug transshipments, plummeting seizures, failure to prosecute corrupt officials, and the indeterminate status of the [U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration] presence in the country."

The administration cites concern about a decline in Bolivian counternarcotics cooperation over the last year, citing policies that have allowed the expansion of coca cultivation.

The report also cites Bolivia's cooperation in interdiction operations resulting in cocaine seizures, and challenges the nation to step up its activity in this area.

"Over the next six months, the U.S. is encouraging this country to eradicate at least 5,000 hectares of illegal cocoa, establish tight controls on sale of illicit coca leaf for traditional use, and strengthen controls on chemicals used to make cocaine," McCampbell said.

The government of Ecuador is described as making "considerable progress in combating narcotics trafficking destined for the United States."

However, the Bush administration has determined that increasing amounts of cocaine are being transported in ships flying the Ecuadorian flag. The U.S. Coast Guard and the Ecuadorian navy are engaged in cooperative efforts to interdict shipments.

CENTRAL-SOUTH ASIA

Afghanistan remains the world's leading producer of opium poppy, growing nearly 90 percent of the world's supply, according to a related report on international narcotics issued by INL in March. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=March&x=20060301175618GLnesnoM0.4282495&t=xarchives/xarchitem.html>).)

In a war-ravaged country with little economic opportunity, farmers have seized on coca as the most profitable crop they can grow. The earlier report estimated that coca accounts for one-third of Afghanistan's gross domestic product.

The presidential determination issued September 18 credits Afghan President Hamid Karzai with a strong attack on narco-trafficking but calls for greater accountability at all levels of government to end poppy cultivation.

With a pointed warning about government corruption, the administration sees high stakes in the Afghan war on drugs.

"We are concerned that failure to act decisively now could undermine security, compromise democratic legitimacy and imperil international support for vital assistance," according to the White House memo.

Drug trafficking and cultivation in Afghanistan spill across the border into neighboring Pakistan, where traffickers in the western provinces provide financing, processing and transport routes for the drugs.

This presidential determination reaches some tough conclusions about the extent of drug trafficking in some countries, but McCampbell said the findings should not be considered a condemnation.

"Nobody is sitting in judgment," McCampbell said. "We're actually trying to work together and figure out how we can solve these problems."

The full text (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/09/20060918-3.html>) of the presidential determination is available on the White House Web site.

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>)
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*WPD106 09/18/2006

Costa Rica Ratifies Inter-American Convention Against Terrorism
(Becomes 21st nation to join efforts to fight terrorism in Western Hemisphere) (560)

By Eric Green
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- Costa Rica has joined the United States and 19 other nations in the Western Hemisphere in ratifying a regional pact designed to eliminate the financing of terrorism and to deny safe haven to suspected terrorists.

In a September 15 statement, the Organization of American States (OAS) said Costa Rica deposited that day the instruments of ratification for the Inter-American Convention Against Terrorism. By doing so, said the OAS, Costa Rica is "thus honoring its commitment to collaborate in the international effort against the scourge" of terrorism.

Costa Rica's permanent representative to the OAS, Javier Sancho Bonilla, said that by ratifying the convention, his country now is "party to all hemispheric and international instruments in force to combat" terrorism.

In reference to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, OAS Secretary-General José Miguel Insulza urged continued cooperation among OAS member states to ensure that terrorism "never occurs" again in the Americas.

The hemispheric convention was adopted June 3, 2002, during the OAS General Assembly in Barbados. The U.S. Senate approved the pact in October 2005. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2005&m=October&x=20051012152220AEnearG0.3901941&t=xarchives/xarchitem.html>).)

The State Department said after the United States ratified the convention in November 2005 that the measure "was a powerful indication of this region's resolve to fight terrorism in all its forms." (See fact sheet (<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2005/56929.htm>).)

John Maisto, U.S. permanent representative to the OAS, says that among the almost 3000 people killed during the terrorist attacks in 2001 were citizens of 30 of the OAS's 34 member states, who were "murdered by the enemies of freedom."

Maisto told the OAS September 12 that the fifth anniversary of the terrorist attacks is a "powerful commemoration, not only for the 296 million citizens of the United States of America, but for the over 800 million people of this hemisphere. Five years and one day ago, 19 terrorists tried to send a message of hate and destruction in New York and Washington, D.C.," but "we saw our countries, our region, and our world come together as a community of nations to provide comfort, solidarity and hope." (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=September&x=200609131258341xeneerg0.4307215>).)

The U.S. State Department said in a report covering the year 2005 that terrorism in the Western Hemisphere primarily was perpetrated by narco-terrorist organizations based in Colombia and by the remnants of radical leftist groups in South America's Andean region.

The report, called Country Reports on Terrorism, said that, except in the United States and Canada, "there are no known operational cells of Islamic terrorists in the hemisphere, although scattered pockets of ideological supporters and facilitators in South America and the Caribbean lent financial, logistical, and moral support to terrorist groups in the Middle East."

The report, released April 28, said Cuba remained a state sponsor of terrorism, while Venezuela virtually ceased its cooperation in the global War on Terror, tolerating terrorists in its territory and seeking closer relations with Cuba and Iran, another state sponsor of terrorism.

The Western Hemisphere section (<http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2005/64346.htm>) is available on the State Department Web site, as is a White House report entitled 9/11 Five Years Later: Successes and Challenges (<http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/wh/71924.htm>).

The full text (<http://www.oas.org/juridico/english/treaties/a-66.htm>) of Inter-American Convention Against Terrorism is available on the OAS Web site.

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*WPD107 09/18/2006

Weekly Review of Developments in Human Rights and Democracy

(State Department's annual International Religious Freedom Report; opening of United Nations General Assembly; death of Turkmen RFE/RL correspondent Ogulsapar Muradova; intimidation of exiled Turkmen

human rights and democracy activists; honors for couple for actions during Holocaust; attacks on journalists in Ukraine) (1240)

Following are some of the most significant recent U.S. government policy pronouncements, hearings and reports on human rights and democracy concerning Eurasia, as well as some noteworthy materials released by international organizations and nongovernmental organizations.

For additional coverage of the topics listed below and related issues, see Europe and Eurasia (<http://usinfo.state.gov/eur>).

STATE DEPARTMENT RELEASES 2006 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

"The United States seeks to promote religious freedom and tolerance and build a more peaceful world for the peoples of all faiths," Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said at the release of the State Department's eighth annual International Religious Freedom Report September 15. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=September&x=20060915123721hmnietua0.6115381>).)

The 2006 report examines countries' commitment to advancing religious freedom from July 1, 2005, to June 30, 2006. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=September&x=20060914164724hmnietua0.1669384>).)

The International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 requires an annual review of the status of religious freedom worldwide. The report to Congress documents governments' actions that could be a barrier to religious freedom, including repressing religious expression, persecuting people for their beliefs or tolerating violence against religious minorities. The report also lists governments that respect, protect and promote religious freedom.

In addition, the act requires designating countries that have "engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom" as a "country of particular concern (CPC)."

The full texts of the 2006 report (<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2006/>) and previous reports (<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/irf/rpt/>) are available on the State Department Web site.

For more information, see International Religious Freedom (http://usinfo.state.gov/dhr/human_rights/intl_religious_freedom.html) and Democracy Dialogues' Freedom of Religion (http://www.democracy.gov/dd/eng_democracy_dialogues/religion.html).

UNITED STATES HOPES TO RAISE U.N. REFORM, HUMAN RIGHTS AT U.N. MEETING

The Bush administration is placing management reform and human rights at the top of its agenda for the upcoming session of the United Nations General Assembly and hopes to gain assurances from the organization as to its use of member resources, as well as direct its attention to critical human rights situations around the world.

In an interview with the Washington File, Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs Kristen Silverberg discusses some of the key issues at the General Assembly sessions. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=September&x=20060912190452esnamfuak0.2124292>).)

For more information, see The United States and the United Nations (http://usinfo.state.gov/is/international_security/UNGA_2005.html).

DEATH OF TURKMEN JOURNALIST SPARKS INTERNATIONAL CONCERN

The death in a Turkmen prison of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) correspondent Ogulsapar Muradova has sparked concern and questions around the world.

"We are very concerned about the death of a prisoner in the government of Turkmenistan's custody and are working to gather the facts," the State Department spokesman said in a statement issued September 14. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=September&x=200609151231221CJsamohT0.4325525>).)

Muradova was arrested June 18, the third RFE/RL Turkmen correspondent to be arrested in 2006. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty is a private, international communications service to Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central and Southwestern Asia funded by the U.S. Congress through the Broadcasting Board of Governors.

"The exact circumstances of Ms. Muradova's death remain unclear, and we call upon the Government of Turkmenistan to provide the results of the autopsy they conducted," the State Department spokesman said. "We will remain closely engaged through our Mission regarding this situation."

In a statement issued September 15, U.S. Helsinki Commission Chairman Senator Sam Brownback, a Republican from Kansas, and Co-Chairman Representative Christopher H. Smith, a Republican from New Jersey, expressed sadness at Muradova's death and called on the government of Turkmenistan to conduct a "thorough and transparent" investigation of her death. (See statement (http://www.csce.gov/index.cfm?Fuseaction=ContentRecords.ViewDetail&ContentRecord_id=524&ContentRecordType=P&ContentType=P&CFID=23295288&CFTOKEN=74231660) on Helsinki Commission Web site.)

The chairman-in-office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Belgian Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht, also expressed deep concern September 15 about Muradova's death and called for "a full and impartial investigation into the circumstances surrounding her death." (See statement (<http://www.osce.org/item/20607.html>) on OSCE Web site.)

RIGHTS GROUPS REACT TO NEW ATTEMPTS TO INTIMIDATE EXILED TURKMEN

The government of Turkmenistan is continuing its attempts to intimidate exiled Turkmen human rights activists and opposition members by harassing or arresting their relatives still in the Central Asian country, according to a September 15 joint statement by the independent human rights advocacy groups the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF) and the Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights (TIHR).

IHF and the TIHR say they are concerned this latest intimidation represents new attempts to force exiled human rights activists and critics of the regime of Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov "to give up their efforts to shed light on the human rights situation in Turkmenistan and to promote democratic change in the country."

"In its clampdown on all forms of dissent, the Turkmen authorities have in recent years increasingly targeted family members of human rights activists and opposition leaders living abroad, including through the use of threats, interrogation, arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment and imprisonment after unfair trials," the statement says.

The full text (http://www.ihf-hr.org/viewbinary/viewdocument.php?doc_id=7040) of the IHF/TIHR statement is available on the IHF Web site.

HOLOCAUST MUSEUM HONORS COUPLE WHO HELPED SAVE THOUSANDS FROM NAZIS

The United States Holocaust Museum honored the Reverend Waitstill Sharp (1905–1999) and his wife Martha Sharp (1902–1984) at a September 14 ceremony for their role in helping approximately 2,000 Jews and political dissidents escape from near-certain death in Nazi-occupied Europe. (See related

article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=September&x=20060914170154jmnamdeirf0.2982904>).)

In June, the Sharps were named "Righteous Among the Nations" by Yad Vashem, the Jerusalem memorial to the 6 million victims of the Nazi Holocaust or Shoah and to the heroes who often risked their lives to save them. Only one other American has been so honored.

Working out of Prague in what was then Czechoslovakia in 1939, the Sharps overcame bureaucratic obstacles to emigration, crisscrossing Europe to secure necessary travel papers, job offers or scholarships often required for entry visas. Later, they arranged transit and frequently accompanied their charges on their dangerous journeys to freedom.

Working with such champions of justice as the writer Varian Fry (the first American named "Righteous Among the Nations") and the American diplomat Hiram Bingham IV, the Sharps established a Unitarian Service Committee office in Lisbon, Portugal, a key departure point for refugees. At Fry's request, Waitstill Sharp also served as Emergency Rescue Committee representative in Marseilles, France. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/scv/Archive/2006/May/26-736045.html>) on Hiram Bingham.)

Additional information (<http://www.ushmm.org/>) about the United States Holocaust Museum is available on its Web site.

PRESS GROUP ALARMED BY RISE IN ATTACKS ON UKRAINE JOURNALISTS

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) is alarmed at a sudden increase in attacks on press freedom and on individual journalists throughout Ukraine, according to a September 14 statement by the international nongovernmental organization.

IFJ cites as cause for alarm a series of incidents in August in which journalists were kidnapped, beaten and denied access to press conferences, while the authorities issued new restrictions on the work of journalists.

The federation also is concerned that, six years after the murder of Ukrainian journalist Georgy Gongadze, those responsible for ordering his murder have yet to be prosecuted.

The lack of resolution in the Gongadze case is related to the upsurge in attacks on press freedom and journalists, IFJ argues. (See statement (<http://www.ifj.org/default.asp?Index=4202&Language=EN>) on IFJ Web site for further details.)

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*WPD108 09/18/2006

United States, Mauritius Sign Trade Agreement

(Pact between two countries intended to strengthen and expand trade ties) (690)

By Helen I. Rouse

Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- The United States and Mauritius signed an agreement September 18 that is intended to strengthen and expand trade ties between the two countries.

The agreement, called a trade and investment framework agreement (TIFA), will provide a formal mechanism to address bilateral trade issues and help enhance trade and investment relations.

"Mauritius' experience demonstrates how trade and investment can fuel economic growth and development," said Deputy U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) Karan Bhatia, who signed the agreement in Washington along with Mauritian Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Cooperation Minister Madan Murlidhar Dulloo.

"The government of Mauritius has an impressive track record on democracy, economic growth, openness to foreign direct investment, economic diversification and the expansion of trade," Bhatia said. "The TIFA will provide an opportunity for our governments to work together to expand trade between our two countries and to work more closely on a broad range of trade-related issues, including moving the World Trade Organization Doha Development Round forward, and on signing the African Growth and Opportunity Act [AGOA]."

Minister Dulloo added: "The signature of the TIFA illustrates the fact that both our countries want to build upon our existing political and economic ties in order to increase trade and investment." He invited American enterprises to consider Mauritius as an investment destination.

The TIFA provides a mechanism for a more comprehensive trade and investment dialogue that will allow the two countries to explore common objectives and review possibilities for improving trade relations.

A United States-Mauritius Trade and Investment Council to be formed under the agreement will address matters such as trade promotion and development, export diversification, trade capacity building, intellectual property, labor, investment and environmental issues. The council plans to establish an ongoing dialogue that will help increase commercial and investment opportunities by identifying impediments to trade and investment flows between the two countries and working to remove them.

MAURITIAN DEMOCRACY, PRIVATE SECTOR WELL ESTABLISHED

Mauritius, a small Southern African island nation located in the Indian Ocean east of Madagascar, is a well-established multiparty democracy that has a market-based economy with a strong and dynamic private sector. Since achieving independence in 1968, the country has developed from a low-income, agriculture-based economy to a middle-income diversified economy with growing industrial, financial and tourist sectors. For most of this period, annual growth has been 5 percent to 6 percent.

Mauritius's economic growth has helped support more equitable income distribution, decreased poverty and a much-improved infrastructure. The government's development strategy has focused on encouraging trade and economic reforms and facilitating a strong business sector for finance, telecommunications and services.

Total trade between the United States and Mauritius was valued at \$252.7 million in 2005. Significant Mauritian exports include textiles and apparel, sugar, processed diamonds, jewelry, eyewear, and canned and frozen fish.

An important positive trend is Mauritius's effort to diversify its exports to the United States. The country is growing as an exporter of worked diamonds, sunglasses and eyewear and also has been able to attract significant investment in the services sector, particularly call centers and information communications technology. Mauritius has attracted more than 9,000 offshore entities, with investment in the banking sector alone reaching more than \$1 billion in 2005.

With its large textile sector, Mauritius is a major beneficiary of AGOA. Exports from Mauritius under AGOA and the Generalized System of Preferences were valued at \$152.6 million in 2005, accounting for 69 percent of the country's total exports to the United States. AGOA has sparked significant investment in Mauritius, and Mauritian investors have made major AGOA-related investments throughout sub-Saharan Africa.

The United States has TIFAs with several other trading partners in sub-Saharan Africa, including Ghana, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, and the West African Economic and Monetary Union.

The full text (http://www.ustr.gov/Document_Library/Press_Releases/2006/September/United_States_Mauritius_Sign_Agreement_to_Strengthen_Exp_Trade_Relations.html) of the USTR press release is available on the office's Web site.

For additional information, see Trade and Economic Development (http://usinfo.state.gov/af/africa/trade_economic_development.html) and African Growth and Opportunity Act (http://usinfo.state.gov/af/africa/trade_economic_development/agoa.html).

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14th Space Station Crew Launches from Baikonur Cosmodrome
(Aboard is first female spaceflight participant to visit orbiting laboratory) (530)

Washington -- Commander Michael Lopez-Alegria and cosmonaut Mikhail Tyurin of the 14th International Space Station crew launched from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan in the early morning hours of September 18 to begin a six-month stay in space.

With them is American Anousheh Ansari, the first female spaceflight participant to visit the orbiting laboratory. She is flying under contract with Roscosmos, the Russian Federal Space Agency, according to a September 18 NASA press release.

Ansari will conduct a series of experiments under an agreement with the European Space Agency (ESA) and return to Earth September 28 with the Expedition 13 crew, Commander Pavel Vinogradov and NASA science officer Jeff Williams.

Lopez-Alegria, 45, will be making his fourth flight into space. He flew three space shuttle missions. On Expedition 14, he also will serve as NASA science officer.

Tyurin, 46, is making his second spaceflight. He served as a member of the station's Expedition 3 crew in 2001, which launched in August and landed in December. He is the second long-duration crewmember to be assigned to a second station expedition.

Expedition 14's Soyuz spacecraft is scheduled to dock at the station early on the morning of September 20. There, the third Expedition 14 crewmember, ESA astronaut Thomas Reiter of Germany, will greet them.

Reiter arrived at the station aboard Discovery on the STS-121 mission in July. He joined Expedition 13, bringing the number of station crewmembers to three for the first time since May 2003. Expedition 13 launched to the station on March 30.

Reiter is the first ESA astronaut to serve as a long-duration space station crewmember. His presence for the first part of Expedition 14 will be valuable for his new crewmates because of his knowledge of the station and its systems. Previous oncoming crews have relied on intense handovers of just more than a week with the predecessor crewmembers before taking over station operations themselves.

Reiter, who served as a crewmember on the Russian space station Mir for six months in 1995, is scheduled to return to Earth aboard Discovery on STS-116 in December.

SHUTTLE TO BRING MORE PERSONNEL IN DECEMBER

Discovery will bring astronaut Sunita Williams to the station to replace Reiter and join Expedition 14 in progress. Williams, 41, a Navy commander, will be making her first spaceflight. She is scheduled to remain on the station until next spring.

The shuttle also will bring the P5 truss to the station. While Discovery is docked, station and shuttle crews will reconfigure the orbiting laboratory's electrical system and activate the new solar arrays brought up by Atlantis on STS-115, which is scheduled to return to Earth September 20.

Expedition 14 will do as many as four spacewalks, perhaps three in January 2007 in U.S. spacesuits, relating to station assembly. The other would be done earlier in Russian spacesuits to retrieve and install experiments.

Two Expedition 15 crewmembers are expected to arrive next spring to replace Lopez-Alegria and Tyurin.

The full text (http://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/station/expeditions/expedition14/exp14_advancer.html) of the press release is available on the NASA Web site.

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*WPD110 09/18/2006

U.S., China Public and Private Sectors Cooperate on Clean Energy
(Clean Coal Forum in Shanxi province targets coal gasification technologies) (1020)

By Cheryl Pellerin
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington – U.S. and Chinese leaders from the public and private sectors met September 12-13 in Shanxi province – an informal gathering of technology and policy experts – to exchange views on using and promoting clean coal technology.

The meeting was arranged by the Jackson Hole [Wyoming] Center for Global Affairs and the Peoples Government of Shanxi Province in China, and sponsored by the Natural Resources Defense Council, an environmental advocacy group, and other energy and environmental organizations.

The focus of the China Clean Coal Forum – co-chaired by Yu Youjun, governor of Shanxi province, and Grant Larson, president of the Wyoming state Senate – was coal gasification, a growing alternative to coal combustion that is a more efficient and more environmentally friendly way to produce electricity and other energy products from coal.

“The collaboration between Shanxi province and the state of Wyoming,” said Justin Swift, deputy assistant secretary for international affairs in the Office of Fossil Energy at the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), “is an excellent example of state-to-state support.”

At the meeting, Swift gave an overview of coal gasification technology, its worldwide capacity and growth, and DOE's gasification research and development program.

The Clean Coal Forum is the fifth in a series of unofficial meetings held to develop and implement an agenda for U.S.-China clean energy cooperation. The meetings arose from an alliance between the largest coal-producing regions in the United States and China – the state of Wyoming and the province of Shanxi.

STATE-TO-STATE COLLABORATION

Jackson Hole – in the 1800s the term “hole” described a high mountain valley – is a spectacular area in northwest Wyoming, known for its proximity to three national parks, vast mountainscapes, abundant wildlife and world-class skiing.

It is also home to the Jackson Hole Center for Global Affairs, whose forward-looking membership created the U.S.-China Clean Energy Initiative.

The initiative began in 2003, when Jackson Hole resident John Turner, assistant secretary of the State Department’s Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs from 2001 to 2005, invited Shanxi officials to his hometown to discuss environmental issues important to both regions.

Three meetings took place in 2003 and 2004, in Shanxi and Jackson Hole, covering a range of energy topics and involving experts and officials from both regions.

“The doors have opened up in the age of globalization,” said David Wendt, president of the Jackson Hole Center for Global Affairs, “to include so many different potential partners from so many sectors on common issues.”

The initiative is also a vehicle for involving the private sector, Wendt said, which has “the resources and technology to make the necessary investments in clean energy priorities.”

The collaborators in Wyoming and Shanxi, Wendt said, “identified a strong interest in integrated gasification combined cycle, a coal gasification process, not coal combustion, that is by far the most energy-efficient process, and efficient in terms of other resources – water, for example – in using coal for electric power generation.”

COAL GASIFICATION

In gasification, coal (or any other carbon-based feedstock) reacts with steam and oxygen or air at high temperature and pressure in an oxygen-lean atmosphere.

The process produces synthesis gas, or syngas, which is mainly carbon monoxide and hydrogen, and smaller amounts of carbon dioxide and methane. Inorganic materials in the coal, like ash and metals, are converted to an inert material called slag that is used in construction and building.

Syngas is used to power turbines to generate electricity, and the integrated gasification combined cycle (IGCC) is one way to do this. The IGCC process combines two “cycles,” meaning two kinds of turbines – combustion and steam. First, the syngas is burned in the combustion turbine, which drives a generator to produce electricity. The leftover “flue” gas is fed into a heat-recovery steam-generating unit, which extracts energy from the heated gas and produces steam. The steam feeds a steam turbine, which also drives a generator to produce electricity.

“In an IGCC plant,” said Gary Stiegel, technology manager for gasification at the DOE National Energy Technology Laboratory in Pennsylvania, “the combustion [cycle] typically produces two thirds of the electricity and one third comes from the steam cycle.”

MANAGING CARBON DIOXIDE

Because IGCC produces most of the electricity from the combustion cycle rather than the steam cycle, the process is more efficient and uses less water than standard coal combustion. There are other environmental benefits, like fewer emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂), sulfur and nitrogen oxides and particulates.

The ease of capturing carbon dioxide – a critical part of the CO2 capture-and-storage process called carbon sequestration, which can help take the greenhouse gas CO2 out of the atmosphere – is another benefit of IGCC.

Meeting participants were interested in IGCC and carbon sequestration, Wendt said, “because the two are linked. IGCC is probably the most cost-effective technology for separating and capturing carbon dioxide, so it’s carbon-capture ready.”

Coal gasification is a versatile and clean way to convert coal into electricity, hydrogen and other energy products, but coal-based IGCC plants still are not fully commercial and IGCC is 10 percent to 20 percent more expensive than a conventional coal combustion plant.

“We need to find advanced technologies to drive those costs down,” Stiegel said, “and at DOE we’re working on a number of different projects to do that.”

IGCC capital costs are high, Wendt said, particularly in China where the comparative cost of putting in a standard coal-powered plant is much lower than in the United States.

“But the gap is narrowing in both countries and the benefits are enormous,” he added. “Our belief is that by bringing the parties together to understand these benefits and to reach an understanding on how they’re going to share the costs and the risks, this needed technology can get jump-started in China.”

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Citizenship Week Inspires Hope for Civic Renewal

(U.S. attorney general cites key elements of U.S. citizenship) (530)

By Carolee Walker

Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- Increased community service and voting in the United States since September 11, 2001, is heartening, but the full-fledged civic renewal for which leaders hoped has not yet occurred, according to U.S. Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales.

“We can take heart in the progress, but must take stock of what is missing,” Gonzales said in Washington at the National Conference on Citizenship on September 18 in honor of Constitution and Citizenship Week.

The post-9/11 spirit of citizenship is vibrant among troops serving in Iraq and among naturalized U.S. citizens, Gonzales said, “but I know that it is not universal in our country. I think we all thought, and hoped, that the renewed sense of citizenship and patriotism would last [after 9/11] and that it would be one more way in which we show our enemies that they won’t win this War on Terror.

“I often leave naturalization ceremonies wondering, when is that moment of pride and allegiance for those of us who were fortunate enough to be born here? And how can we inspire that feeling in those who may not know how fortunate they are?”

“Citizenship” is more than just being a citizen and calls for involvement in American politics and society, Gonzales said.

The attorney general said three key elements of American citizenship teach and inspire civic involvement. Learning and appreciating America's history and foundations, especially in everyday life by respecting the rule of law, is first, he said, followed by voting and volunteering.

Gonzales suggested the possibility of a rebirth of citizenship through a renewed emphasis on the Constitution in American history classes.

"Every leader in public life should call on American schools and teachers to spend more time studying the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution with their students," Gonzales said.

Citizenship depends on Americans going to the polls and voting, Gonzales said, and they must have confidence that their vote will be counted. "We cannot expect to have populist government if the public does not broadly exercise their right to hire and fire their representatives," Gonzales asserted. "The right to vote is the lifeblood of our democracy."

Gonzales added that in such new democracies as Afghanistan and Iraq, "despite continuing danger, the citizens of those countries have participated [in elections] in the millions," Gonzales said.

Volunteerism is an element of citizenship that is good for society and good for the soul, he added.

"Whenever I speak to young lawyers I always encourage them to consider public service because in giving to others we rekindle and refine ourselves," he said.

"Whether it is the war on poverty, the war on drugs or the war on illiteracy we have citizen soldiers who confront daily the evils of our society so that our country remains a place where dreams still come true," Gonzales said.

The full text (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/09/20060914-14.html>) of the presidential proclamation of Constitution and Citizenship Week is available on the White House Web site. The full text (http://justice.gov/ag/speeches/2006/ag_speech_060918.html) of Gonzales' prepared remarks is available on the Department of Justice Web site.

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*WPD112 09/18/2006

Muslim, Jewish Communities Secure Halal-Kosher Labeling Law
(Diverse communities in Virginia work to further common interests) (620)

By Michael Jay Friedman
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- Muslim and Jewish communities in the state of Virginia successfully have lobbied for enactment of a halal/kosher labeling statute. The new Virginia law requires that any food offered for sale as kosher or halal be labeled with the name of the person or organization certifying the item kosher or halal. Violations are punishable by a \$500 fine.

Observant Muslims and Jews observe similar, but not identical, dietary restrictions. These practices -- halal for Muslims and kashrut (kosher) for Jews -- forbid consumption of certain foods and regulate how animals may be slaughtered. Trained individuals and organizations ensure compliance with these standards and permit vendors to affix their symbol of compliance on the product packaging.

In the United States, the "Crescent M" is a leading halal certification symbol. There are a number of common kosher symbols, or hekshers.

Legal issues arise when state governments' legitimate desire to protect their citizens from fraud bumps up against the constitutional prohibition against laws "respecting an establishment of religion."

In recent years, the courts have invalidated laws that use religious standards to categorize food products. The New Jersey Supreme Court, for example, in 1996 declared unconstitutional regulations that defined kosher as complying with "Orthodox Jewish law." That definition, the court held, "impose[s] substantive religious standards ... and authorize[s] civil enforcement of those religious standards with the assistance of clergy, directly and substantially entangling government in religious matters."

After that decision, several states enacted laws that focus not on whether food meets religious standards but instead on fraudulent labeling. These laws typically require those who represent their food as kosher or halal to make public names and other information about the certifying authority. These measures allow consumers to decide for themselves whether a particular item comports with their dietary code.

The growing Muslim community in Virginia "had little recourse if food labeled halal turned out not to be genuine," civic leader Imad Damaj told the Richmond Times-Dispatch. The onus fell on the consumer, Muneer A. Baig, vice president of the nonprofit Muslim Association of America, told the Washington File.

Several Muslim leaders suggested to their local legislator that Virginia join the growing number of states enacted a halal-labeling law. Virginia already had a kosher law, but that law was believed susceptible to the type of court challenge that had prevailed in New Jersey and elsewhere.

The two communities decided to work together toward the nation's first joint kosher and halal statute. With a coalition of Muslim, Jewish and interfaith organizations supporting it, the new law was passed by a unanimous state Senate vote and by 96–2 in the General Assembly. It then was signed into law by Governor Tim Kaine, a Democrat, in the presence of Muslim and Jewish community leaders in early August.

With the new law in place, the onus for selling mislabeled food now falls on the vendor, says Baig.

Rabbi Leibel Fajnlund of Chabad Lubavitch of Northern Virginia agrees that the statute fills a real need. He told the Washington File that government should empower citizens to ensure that neither suppliers nor merchants take advantage of their efforts to fulfill a "cornerstone" spiritual practice.

Fajnlund believes a disclosure statute like Virginia's is appropriate. "You have the right to know what you are eating, but government should not be able to say what is kosher."

Partnership between communities to advocate common goals is the essence of the American political system. "When people work together as partners to humanity" they can achieve success, Baig says. When they work against each other, "we all lose."

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*WPD113 09/18/2006

Partnerships with U.S. Muslim, Sikh Leaders Boost Law Enforcement

(Security agencies and communities cooperate to protect civil rights, leaders say) (880)

By Lea Terhune

Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- "Our country is more secure today because law enforcement and America's Arab, Muslim, Sikh and South Asian communities are working more closely together," according to Homeland Security's Daniel W. Sutherland.

"We sincerely hope and expect that those relationships will deepen and strengthen as the years progress," the officer for civil rights and civil liberties at the Department of Homeland Security said, introducing a panel on security enhancement through community involvement at the National Press Club in Washington September 15.

Addressing the group, Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights Wan Kim called the September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States "a seminal event in the nation's history" and deplored post-9/11 hate crimes against Arab and Sikh Americans. Among the most effective tools to counter such incidents are outreach programs to the Arab and South Asian American community leaders, he said, adding that cooperation with federal, state and local law enforcement officials has enhanced protection of civil rights in their communities and brought criminals to justice.

Kim cited the examples of James Herrick, who attempted to burn down a Pakistani restaurant in Salt Lake City; Frank Roque, who gunned down Balbir Singh Sodhi, a Sikh, in a Mesa, Arizona, service station; and an Iowa Marriot hotel that, under false pretences, canceled an agreement to host an American Syrian and Lebanese group's annual convention. Kim said there was redress in each case: Herrick was sentenced to five years in prison; Roque was sentenced to death; and the Marriot apologized, paid \$100,000 in compensation and instituted training for its employees in cultural sensitivity.

MORE FEDERAL RESOURCES DEVOTED TO PROTECTING CIVIL RIGHTS

Since 2001, the Department of Justice has investigated more than 700 cases throughout the United States and brought federal charges against 35 defendants, Kim said. Attorneys from Homeland Security's civil rights division coordinated with state prosecutors in 150 nonfederal prosecutions, "in many cases providing substantial assistance."

Cases of harassment of Muslim students have been investigated. "In New York, currently we are litigating a case involving the right of Muslim and Sikh bus and subway drivers to wear their religious headgear," he said.

Since 9/11, more people have been detailed to track civil rights issues in the Homeland Security and Justice departments. The Department of Justice sponsored more than 250 town hall meetings with American Arabs, Muslims and South Asians around the country to address their concerns, Kim said, adding, "But this is a process, not a destination. There is more work to be done."

New training on cultural issues has been incorporated at the FBI, according to FBI unit chief Brett Hovington. "We are fighting in a totally different environment these days, and the war on terrorism is not going to be won, necessarily, with knocking down doors, but based on building relationships," he said.

TERRORISM, EXTREMISM REPRESENT "CLASH OF THE UNCIVILIZED"

Panelist Imam Mohamed Hagmagid Ali of the All Dulles Area Muslim Society Center in Virginia spoke of its work "to make sure [the Muslim] community protects itself from being penetrated by extremists and those who might wish harm to our nation and hijack our religion."

A decree, or fatwa, denouncing terrorism was issued at his mosque. Programs for youth "to integrate them into society," such as the Boy Scouts, are emphasized. Networking with other religious organizations and civil rights groups, instituting a "mosque without walls" open to Muslim and non-Muslim alike, and establishing dialogues with U.S. government agencies are effective approaches to the issues that affect the Muslim community, he said.

"There has been a collective decision at the level of the Muslim communities of America to become a part of the solution in the post 9/11 conflict as opposed to a part of the problem," said Ahmed Younis, national director of the Muslim Public Affairs Council. He supported the imam's view that mosques can ensure community integrity remains intact, that they are not manipulated "to engage in acts of extremism or acts of terrorism."

He said the discourse begins among Muslims themselves, with amplification of Islam's message against terrorism and extremism, and financial accountability to congregations and transparency about where and how charitable funds are being spent.

"We do not subscribe to the proposition that there is a clash of civilizations, we as Muslims subscribe to the proposition that there is a clash of the uncivilized," Younis said.

Manjit Singh, head of the Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund, described the ongoing problems that American Sikhs have experienced, and how Sikh organizations have worked with U.S. security agencies to define culturally sensitive guidelines for airport screening. "One can't have security without making everyone secure," he said. "We can't be discriminatory and say security applies to some and not to others."

To a question about why American Muslims are not drawn to extremism as readily as their European counterparts, Ali offered, "American Muslims are unique. They are very integrated with the community."

Other panel participants were Laila Al-Qatami, communications director for the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee and Dr. Yahya Basha, of Basha Diagnostics P.C.

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*WPD114 09/18/2006

Hispanic Americans Contributing to the American Mosaic

(Latin presence enriches U.S. government, society, popular culture, sports) (1030)

Washington – Hispanics, who became the largest minority group in the United States in 2002, are changing American society and culture.

Hispanics now fill top positions in the U.S. government, with Mexican-American Alberto Gonzales serving as U.S. attorney general and Cuban-born Carlos Gutierrez as secretary of commerce. In 2004, Florida voters elected another Cuban native, Mel Martinez, formerly secretary of housing and urban development, to the U.S. Senate.

Language might most dramatically reflect the influence of Hispanics on American life. Author and journalist Richard Rodriguez, a Mexican-American commentator for the Public Broadcasting System, says Spanish is heard everywhere in the United States, and that because of the massive migration of Latin Americans northward, the United States might be home to the world's fifth-largest Spanish-speaking population, after Mexico, Spain, Argentina and Colombia.

The roots of the Hispanic experience in America lie in St. Augustine, Florida, the oldest city in the United States. The city, founded in 1565, served as a strategic sea and land base for Spain to block foreign advances against the Spanish empire in "New Spain," which included present-day Mexico, the countries of the Caribbean and Central America, and the U.S. states of California, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas.

The word "Hispanic," once used as a reference to people originating from Spain, has taken on new meaning. In modern-day America, the overwhelming majority of the U.S. Hispanic population hails from Latin America.

The "Hispanic" label is precise. Mexican-Americans, especially, often choose not to identify with Spain because of their colonial experience under Spanish domination. Many Latin Americans in the United States call themselves Latinos or claim other ethnic identities because of their racially mixed background, either Native American or African, along with some European ancestry. And other Hispanics are Caucasian of European ancestry.

Whatever their ethnic background, people of Latin American or Spanish-speaking European origin are affecting American society and life. The two major U.S. political parties, judging by their outreach efforts to attract the Hispanic vote, are well aware of the growth in the country's Hispanic population. U.S. census data show the Hispanic population in the United States now numbers more than 41 million, or one-seventh of the U.S. total population of more than 296 million.

Los Angeles, named by 18th century Mexican settlers, is the largest Hispanic city in the United States. The city's highest-rated television and radio stations carry Spanish programming. In January 2005, voters in Los Angeles elected their first Hispanic mayor in more than 100 years, city councilman Antonio Villaraigosa.

The list of Hispanics' contributions to American life has been recognized by the U.S. government, which designates each September 15 to October 15 as National Hispanic American Heritage Month. During this period, the United States honors Hispanic Americans, who have long served as leaders in business, government, law, science, athletics, the arts and many other fields. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/scv/Archive/2005/Sep/06-87873.html>).)

ENTERTAINMENT AND CULTURE

Since the 1950s, a number of Hispanic American music performers have gained widespread popularity, including Julio Iglesias, Jennifer Lopez, Carlos Santana, Gloria Estefan and the group Los Lobos.

One of the most popular singers of traditional Latin music was Cuban-born Celia Cruz, known as the Queen of Salsa. Cruz performed for more than 50 years in both Cuba and the United States until her death in 2003. Cruz achieved cross-cultural success when she began teaming with such popular African-American singers as Patti Labelle and Dionne Warwick.

A number of painters and writers also have sought to capture the Hispanic American experience, such as Hispanic artists John Valadez, Martin Ramirez, Frank Romero and Arnaldo Roche. Tomas Rivera, Julia Alvarez, Sandra Cisneros, Luis Valdez and Heberto Padilla rank among the many Hispanic writers who have achieved distinction in the United States, while other major Hispanic American figures in the arts include architect Bernardo Fort-Brescia and fashion designers Adolfo Sardina and Oscar de la Renta.

Among many prominent Hispanic American actors is Edward James Olmos, who starred in such movie as *Stand and Deliver*, about a Los Angeles educator, and *American Me*, a dramatic portrayal of how crime and violence afflicts the Hispanic community.

Another area in which the Hispanic influence is readily apparent in the United States. Mexican foods are especially popular, with the taco -- a folded tortilla filled with meat, cheese, and other ingredients -- as common in some areas as the American staples of hamburgers and hot dogs. Other Mexican dishes, such as enchiladas, tamales and tostadas, also are served in restaurants throughout the United States.

SPORTS

Many Hispanic athletes have made their mark in American sports, particularly in baseball. The list of notables includes Roberto Clemente of Puerto Rico, who died in a 1972 airplane crash while delivering humanitarian supplies to earthquake victims in Nicaragua.

Other Hispanics in Major League Baseball's Hall of Fame include Orlando Cepeda, Juan Marichal and Luis Aparicio. Ted Williams, considered the quintessential American ballplayer, was also of Hispanic heritage. As shown by his birth certificate in the Hispanic Heritage Baseball Museum in San Francisco, Williams' mother, Maria Hernandez Venzor, was born in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico.

The Hispanic Baseball Museum says that as of 2005, at least 30 percent of all Major League Baseball players were born in Latin America, coming mostly from Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Puerto Rico and Venezuela. The Hispanic influence is apparent in other sports as well, notably soccer. U.S.-based Hispanic immigrants have imported their love of soccer north to their new home, and the game's growing popularity in the United States is at least partly attributable to this trend.

As more and more Hispanic Americans are making their presence felt in their chosen fields, the 21st century likely will witness even greater Hispanic contributions to U.S. society and culture. National Hispanic American Heritage Month aims to recognize past and present achievements and to encourage future ones.

See also the full text (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=texttrans-english&y=2006&m=September&x=20060914161919xjsnommis0.6923029>) of the president's September 14 proclamation.

(Distributed by the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>)
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*WPD115 09/18/2006

Understanding Information-Driven World Requires Media Literacy
(Antonio López of World Bridger Media discusses media literacy in IIP webchat) (580)

By Tim Receveur
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington – The Internet, television, radio and newspapers provide the world with more information than any other time in history. However, information contains biases, and people often lack the critical-thinking skills to understand it, says a media literacy expert.

"Media Literacy is not the greatest term because it implies taking a literate approach, that is, one based on reading and writing, and applying it to media, which has many different elements such as sound, photography or moving images," said Antonio López of World Bridger Media.

López, in a September 18 webchat sponsored by the U.S. Department of State's International Information Programs (IIP), discussed the importance of understanding media as well as creating your own.

Wikipedia, an online collaborative encyclopedia, defines media literacy as the ability to "access, analyze, evaluate and use" media. López said he believes media literacy should be taught as a class in schools.

"Media literacy is mainly taught in after-school programs, or outside the school. This is the fault of states [that] set the standards. They need to make media literacy part of their standards," said López.

"It is our job to help them be critical, especially with the Internet and with sources like Wikipedia," he said. "Kids really need to learn how to question the source of the information they are seeing on the Web."

When asked the difference between media literacy and media education, López said an “educated person can civically engage the society. The literate person only learns how to read.”

In addition to understanding the messages on the Internet or the television, López stressed the importance of creating your own media and incorporating do-it-yourself (DIY) values in your work.

“We live in such a mediated culture these days, and to me, media space is what ‘legitimizes’ identity, so unless you are represented in it, you don’t really exist,” said López.

“I always tell people to produce more media than they consume,” he said during one of his videos on the World Bridger Media Web site.

“There is the saying, ‘If information were knowledge, we’d all be geniuses.’ Just because you know how to edit a movie also doesn’t make one an artist. What is lacking in our education, in my opinion, is art, creativity and wisdom,” he said.

The webchat was held to complement first lady Laura Bush’s conference in New York City on literacy with an emphasis on information and media literacy and the United Nations General Assembly. To highlight U.S. efforts in promoting literacy and helping to encourage other countries on the issue, the first lady invited other leaders’ spouses, ministers of education and educational experts to join her at that conference. UNESCO, which runs many international literacy programs, also participated. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=September&x=20060915145013ajatia0.955517>).)

López is a product of the alternative press revolution and has covered independent media for regional papers and national magazines for more than 15 years, according to the World Bridger Media Web site.

A transcript (<http://usinfo.state.gov/usinfo/Archive/2006/Sep/18-401983.html>) of Lopez’s webchat is available on IIP’s Webchat Station (<http://usinfo.state.gov/usinfo/Products/Webchats.html>), along with information about upcoming webchats.

More information (<http://www.world-bridger.com/>) on media literacy and the work being performed by World Bridger Media can be found at it Web site.

For additional information on the 61st session of the U.N. General Assembly, see The United States and the United Nations (http://usinfo.state.gov/is/international_security/UNGA_2005.html).

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>)
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*WPD116 09/18/2006

Transcript: Journalist Discusses the Importance of Media Literacy
(USINFO Webchat transcript, September 18) (2650)

Antonio Lopez, of World Bridger Media, responds to questions in a September 18 USINFO Webchat about media literacy and do-it-yourself values in journalism and the media.

Following is the transcript:

(begin transcript)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Bureau of International Information Programs

USINFO Webchat Transcript

Guest: Antonio R. López
Date: September 18, 2006
Time: 8:00 a.m. EDT (1200 GMT)

Media Literacy Webchat Kicks Off UNESCO Conference

WEBCHAT MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Antonio López of World Bridger Media to our chat today.

Mr. López would you like to start off with some opening remarks about media literacy?

QUESTION [Tim]: What effect has the Internet had on the DIY community?

ANSWER [Antonio López]: I think I answered this above, but when I was into the punk scene (early '80s) all we had was the phone, photocopiers, glue, pens and paper. Given the tools kids have these days, they are way ahead and I think a lot more media savvy. The difference, though, is that there is a willingness to "sell out" very quickly, which back in my time that was the taboo thing you could do. These days everyone wants to be famous. You can thank Warhol for that, but he's one of my heroes too, so I don't think it's entirely his fault. It's just that we live in such a mediated culture these days, and to me, media space is what "legitimizes" identity, so unless you are represented in it, you don't really exist.

Q [Tim]: Are the bands more DIY now or when you were covering the scene for Punk Planet?

What popular bands are practicing DIY?

A: I'm not up on a lot newer bands that call themselves "punk" but I've noticed that the term "DIY" or do-it-yourself is more popular these days. It's a sign of legitimacy. Unfortunately there are some cases where it is used to make things like a certain type of porn cool, because it has a DIY aesthetic, but in name only. That is the danger of our era: that words and signs are used outside of their initial context with no real meaning. But with that said, the whole new Internet and Web 2.0 is evolving as very DIY. I think MySpace is a good example. A lot of bands are no longer using record companies because they realize they can do everything themselves and keep all their profits. A band that resembles this model is Spearhead. I also like Ozomatli. These are more in the mode of world music, but they all came out of punk and have the attitude that artists should be self-sufficient.

Q [Tim]: Are the bands more DIY now or when you were covering the scene for Punk Planet?

What popular bands are practicing DIY?

A: I'm not up on a lot newer bands that call themselves "punk" but I've noticed that the term "DIY" or do-it-yourself is more popular these days. It's a sign of legitimacy. Unfortunately there are some cases where it is used to make things like a certain type of porn cool, because it has a DIY aesthetic, but in name only. That is the danger of our era: that words and signs are used outside of their initial context with no real meaning. But with that said, the whole new Internet and Web 2.0 is evolving as very DIY. I think MySpace is a good example. A lot of bands are no longer using record companies because they realize they can do everything themselves and keep all their profits. A band that resembles this model is Spearhead. I also like Ozomatli. These are more in the mode of world music, but they all came out of punk and have the attitude that artists should be self-sufficient. [September 18, 2006 08:13]

Q [Tim]: What is media literacy?

I've seen the term many times, but don't know the exact definition.

A: Sorry for the delay- I had a little technical problem.

Hi, good morning from New York. Media Literacy is not the greatest term because it implies taking a literate approach, that is, one based on reading and writing, and applying it to media, which has many different elements such as sound, photography or moving images. But, we lack a better term. A media literate person is one who can "read," evaluate and communicate those ideas concerning a particular sample from the media pool. Educators believe these days its better to use new media as a tool for critiquing new media, i.e. make a video to respond to video, or print ad to respond to a print ad.

Q [d]: Media literacy, information literacy, and technology literacy.

Are these the same thing or are there differences?

A: Very different. To me the big problem is that what we call literacy has no wisdom. There is the saying, if information were knowledge, we'd all be geniuses. Just because you know how to edit a movie also doesn't make one an artist. What is lacking in our education, in my opinion, is art, creativity and wisdom (philosophy, if you will)

Q [ceemajo]: Good morning.

You talk about cultural literacy. I saw a book about that a long time ago, saying that people more and more DO NOT share cultural concepts, so communications is more difficult. The only cultural connections among Americans are TV commercials and the song from Gilligan's Island.

In a diverse country like the U.S., and an even more diverse world, is it possible to have a common cultural literacy?

A: Good question. "Cultural" literacy tends to mean literacy in elitist culture. What I think cultural literacy, in my sense, is including the world that kids live in as part of their education. Native Americans for example should be taught that their lived world is also a legitimate "text." That said, kids should also be exposed to great works from many cultures. I am a believer in multiculturalism, even though that is a bad word these days.

Q [Andrew]: When I was in the US I thought the evening news was infotainment.

Am I way off or does the US lack the objective news I'm used to at home?

A: Yes, compared to Europe, our news to me is very entertainment oriented. In my opinion, it is quite awful, but I think most people here feel the same, left and right. I don't think there is such a thing as objectivity, even in Europe because news is always produced with an institutional bias, and institutions have filters. And every country has its blind spot. The reason I think we lack good news is because the audience doesn't demand it, and we don't demand it because our education system doesn't promote critical engagement with the outside world (in my opinion, at least).

Q [Andrew]: What software applications should I learn to be media literate?

A: I think it is a good idea to learn a few programs such an image editor like Photoshop, an HTML editor to make basic Web pages, a movie editor to learn how to make a simple video, and presentation program like PowerPoint, to learn how to combine these materials to tell a story or make an argument. A lot of teachers think Flash is a good program for kids, but I find it too complicated.

Q [Petra]: Should media literacy have a popular culture bias?

A: I think it should apply to all media, including fine art. I would teach kids first how to read fine art, then how to read film, starting with early film, and also how to read photography. I'm a big fan of using two different type of media and compare them, such as a clip from a serious documentary with something like the Ali G Show. Popular culture does need to be engaged, for sure.

Q [christoph]: Does media literacy require student media production activities?

A: Absolutely. I don't think it is sufficient to just write about new media because the forms are alien to each other. Print is not adequate to describe new media, but can only approximate it. But, new media does have print in it, so I'm not saying let's stop reading books, but we have to realize that we are not in the 19th century anymore. I think there is a tendency for people to think that books are high culture and everything else is low culture. I don't feel that is the case.

Q [Duyan]: Should media literacy have an agenda? How do you make your media literacy workshops culturally specific?

A: An example of culturally specific media workshop would use hip-hop as a legitimate example worthy of cultural production and analysis. I also, respecting local culture and trying to incorporate examples that are relevant to the community. My concern is the homogenizing effects of mass media and culture.

Q [Ute]: Should media literacy become part of school curricula?

A: Yes, yes, yes, and tripple yes. It has to; otherwise we are doomed to become a culture of mindless consumers.

Q [Book1]: Greetings from Frankfurt, Germany.

How do you reach out to multicultural audiences?

A: I go to conferences sponsored by regional health organizations and work with a lot of NGOs and nonprofits. I suggest going to community organizations because they are the ones doing outreach and know where people are.

Q [d]: Is there a difference between media literacy and media education?

A: I think I responded to this already, but very quickly again because it is an important point. The difference is wisdom. An educated person can civically engage the society. The literate person only learns how to read.

Q [jonson]: There is a very sophisticated information and entertainment media around the world.

Do you think that kids are being taught enough critical thinking skills to separate information from entertainment?

A: No, kids are not. Though I find that they are sophisticated in that they already practice the language of new media, they are just not conscious of it. I like to think of it as the difference between being mindless and mindful. It is our job to help them be critical, especially with the Internet and with sources like Wikipedia.

Q [jonson]: Who is teaching people media and technology literacy skills today? Is this being taught in US public schools?

A: Media literacy is mainly taught in after school programs, or outside the school. This is the fault of states who set the standards. They need to make media literacy part of their standards. New Mexico has done a good job of making media literacy part of public education. I'd also like to see the Federal government take a greater interest in it.

Q [Book1]: What ideas do you have to incorporate geographical literacy into media and multicultural literacy? It seems to be entirely missing in mainstream media.

A: Yes, good point. I'm not an expert on this, but I know the national geographic society is concerned about this. They did a survey and found that more people knew where the show "Survivor" was staged than where Iraq is. Again, I think it is a matter of the quality of education and state standards.

Antonio López: Hi everyone, I've been so busy responding to your questions I didn't have a chance to make an introductory remark, so I'll just say I'm happy to be here and you all are asking great questions. I'm just going to jump back in and get to the heart of your inquiries. (I apologies in advance for my typos!)

Q [Anna]: How much, in your opinion, media shapes up the audience behavior?

Do you think media produces its own consumers or it reflects the audience's behavior?

A: It's a feedback system, so it goes back and forth. I think mass media generally has more power to advance certain cultural attitudes because it's just everywhere, but most studies I've seen show that person-to-person communication is still the most powerful way to influence and exchange ideas. Also, there is a lot of new research that shows that cognition plays a big part in how information travels. Ultimately, I think as consumers we have the most power, but only if we are educated.

Q [Tim]: Hi Mr. Lopez, Do you think the relationship between the Internet and newspapers is similar to the relationship between Broadway and cinema in 1920?

Initially people looked down on cinema as low culture, but over 10-15 years it became legitimate. It seems that newspapers and television are now embracing the Internet.

A: I haven't studied the '20s, but it sounds like a good analogy. I think the Internet has a stronger pull because it is very interactive. It is popular because it can be personalized and edited. I believe this is a good situation for consumers. The problem, though, is that investigative reporting is very costly and I don't know yet how Internet companies can sustain a budget for regional offices and research staff. There is way too much rumor as news, but that is not necessarily a new reality. Also, I don't think we can isolate media forms anymore. Everything now is a hybrid.

Q [Tony]: What is the most important type of media to learn? Is the Internet now more important than television?

A: It's all important, and tools for one can be applied to the other. Film and TV should be taught, but also the issue of "credibility" on the Web. Kids really need to learn how to question the source of the information they are seeing on the Web. There is a new phenomena of hate groups using "cloaked" sites that look legitimate, but when you probe you see the information is completely false. For example, there is a site that is supposed to be on the history of Martin Luther King, but when you examine the content, you discover that it is produced by a racist group.

Q [Tony]: There was a US study a couple of years ago that said that kids who learn on computers at school are dumber than those who study directly from books.

Based on your experience, what is your opinion on this?

A: I find that very suspicious. "Dumb" is a loaded term. There are different types of intelligence. I think book literacy makes people dumb in certain ways, but smarter in others. The same is true with computers. Some are visual learners, some are not. This is why I oppose standardized tests. I happened to score very badly on standardized tests, but I did very well in school and have been successful in my work. A lot of kids I work with are bad test takers and so when they score badly they think they are dumb or less intelligent when that is not the case. That's what happened to me when I was a kid, and it was a terrible sensation. Neil Postman has written some great commentary on this subject. I recommend Technopoly.

WEBCHAT MODERATOR: We would like to thank all of our guests from around the world for their participation this morning.

Mr. Lopez thanks for taking time out of your busy day to discuss this very important topic with us. Would you like to add any closing remarks?

Antonio López: If anyone feels like they want me to follow-up on anything, please let me know. These are big issues and it's hard to adequately respond in short bursts. But these are awesome questions!

Thanks! I had fun.

A transcript of today's Webchat will be available on our USINFO Webchat Station (<http://usinfo.state.gov/usinfo/Products/Webchats.html>) within one business day.

WEBCHAT MODERATOR: (While guests are chosen for their expertise, the views expressed by the guests are their own and do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Department of State.)

(end transcript)

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*WPD117 09/18/2006

Transcript: Press Gaggle by Dana Perino and National Security Advisor Steve Hadley
(President's schedule, U.N. General Assembly, Middle East, Iran/EU3, Palestinian Authority/President Abbas) (2020)

(begin transcript)

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
(New York, New York)
September 18, 2006

PRESS GAGGLE BY DANA PERINO AND
NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR STEVE HADLEY

Aboard Air Force One
En Route New York

11:12 A.M. EDT

MS. PERINO: We're on our way to New York City for the U.N. General Assembly, the annual meeting that the President attends. I'll go quickly through the schedule, and then I have a guest speaker, Steve Hadley, National Security Advisor to the President.

The President had his normal briefings this morning. At 12:15 p.m., he's going to join Mrs. Bush at her -- at the White House Conference on Global Literacy. That's at the New York Public Library. Mrs. Bush will introduce the President. There are approximately 200 attendees -- 32 First Ladies and spouses, 41 ministers of education from over 75 countries, NGOs, foundation representatives, literary experts. And you'll also see there Secretary Rice and Secretary Spelling. And Mrs. Bush is hosting the first ever White House Conference on Global Literacy and she will highlight a variety of successful literacy programs.

And then this afternoon, the President has five bilateral meetings -- the Prime Minister of Malaysia, followed by the President of El Salvador, a meeting with the President of Honduras, and then the President of Tanzania. This evening he attends a Republican National Committee reception.

Also to note, an addition to the schedule for Wednesday morning. The President will meet with President Abbas at 9:30 a.m., pool at the end.

And a final note before I turn it over to Mr. Hadley. Steve Bradbury, the Acting Assistant Attorney General for Legal Counsel at the U.S. Department of Justice, will be the guest on "Ask The White House" today at 2:00 p.m., and he will be able to discuss legislation regarding the tools that we're seeking and the war on terror.

I'll let Steve give you some background on the U.N. GA that we're going to, and then if you need to have additional questions after that, I'll follow up and can give you a little bit more about tomorrow's speech.

MR. HADLEY: Good morning. How are we doing, everybody? I think a focus of a lot of the President's attentions, remarks and activities is going to be the freedom agenda, which continues to be at the core of his foreign policy. It's particularly timely to have that at the center of discussion now, given both the challenges and the opportunities in the Middle East. I think the President sees this -- he's talked about it publicly, I think he will talk about it at the U.N. -- as a struggle between the forces of extremism and the forces of moderation in the Middle East. And it's really a crucial time.

And, of course, as you know, his view is that in that struggle, the freedom agenda has an important part to play to give the people in the region a vision of hope and opportunity and a better future. He's going to talk a little bit about, and showcase in the various events, the positive steps that have occurred and begun to occur in terms of the freedom agenda, of course, the most remarkable being the processes of freedom and democracy going on in Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon, but also elsewhere in the region. He will also, I think, emphasize the fact that countries need to find their way towards free and just societies in their own time consistent with their own culture and traditions.

He will talk about -- and I think really challenge all of the other countries assembled there, and the United Nations as an institution, to take some responsibility in its role -- and step up to the role of encouraging this process and encouraging the forces of moderation in this struggle against extremism. And he'll note, I think, the fact that people I think are increasingly recognizing that that is the struggle and the stakes for all of us in the outcome of that struggle.

Some of the events he will have will highlight that. You'll hear, I think, in some of the comments he'll make at the literacy event the importance of education as being an element of sustainable democratic societies, but also as a vehicle for giving -- for empowering people and giving them more control over their own lives, and an opportunity to advance their own well-being.

There will be a meeting with a group of new democracies and those who are supporting the spread of freedom. We did it last year. There will be another one this year to take stock what has been -- happened in the course of the last year, but also to highlight the importance of NGOs -- non-government organizations -- that have been under some pressure in some quarters, the important role that they play in helping societies find their way to freedom and democracy.

Secretary Rice is going to have a number of events that also are consistent with this theme, talking, of course, with the Quartet. She will have also some discussions in connection with the International Compact for Iraq, as an effort by the international community to support the process of democratic evolution in Iraq.

So a lot of events organized around the central themes, and these themes will be a subject that will come up in a number of the bilaterals that the President will have while he's there. Of course, he's going to be meeting with President Abbas, and a number of other -- of the leaders that are there, as well, including President Talabani.

So that's really the kind of construct and theme for the trip. Anything anybody wants to add? You all set? All right, Michael Kozak did a backgrounder, I think, the night before last, and I incorporate by reference everything he said. Any questions?

QUESTION: -- is the President going to talk to Iran tomorrow, and to what extent -- what do you hope is going to come out of the week in terms of progress in terms of diplomacy on Iran?

MR. HADLEY: I don't -- I think the process in Iran is pretty well said. As you know, Secretary Rice is going to do a stock-taking with her counterparts in the so-called P5 plus one. This is the group of countries that have been looking at this. It will be part of the ongoing process of coming together behind a resolution in the Security Council that would involve sanctions on Iran for their failure to meet the requirements the international community has set out in the last resolution.

So that process will be ongoing. It won't certainly conclude over the next two days, it will be an ongoing process. And, of course, in parallel with that, Javier Solana, the EU representative -- he's continuing to have his conversations with Larajani for the Iranian side. Again, that process continues.

I don't think there will be any direct contact with the Iranian delegations. Those are really the two tracks on which we are pursuing our Iranian policy at this point.

Q: There was a lot of talk over the weekend about the EU3 meeting with Iran separately without the United States, and then they would agree to some sort of suspension of their uranium enrichment process, and then the United States would come to the table. What do you think is going to come out of that?

MR. HADLEY: The question is there's some speculation in the press that the EU3 might meet with Iran, talk about a suspension, and once that was achieved, the U.S. could join the talks. Look, the conversation with Solana are ongoing with Larajani. Obviously, it's useful for those conversations to be somewhat confidential. The framework of those conversations is very clear. We've all said -- the EU3, the U.N., the IAEA -- we have all said we need to see a verifiable suspension of the enrichment program, and then the United States would be prepared to join the negotiations to talk about the proposal that the EU3 plus the United States, China and Russia put on the table. And that is a proposal that, if accepted by Iran, will have a lot of benefits for the Iranian people in terms of bringing them prosperity and a better way of life.

So we would hope that Iran would see their way clear to agree to a verifiable suspension so we can then begin to negotiate the details of that broader path.

Q: Is that likely?

MR. HADLEY: We don't know.

Q: -- you said verifiable suspension. Can it be a temporary suspension and still have talks?

MR. HADLEY: That's what it is, is a verifiable suspension so you can have discussions. One of the issues in those discussions will be what happens to their enrichment program over the long-term. We've been very clear what our view is on that. But it would clearly be -- a permanent solution to this problem, is what you negotiate about. So what we've always said was not permanent suspension; what we've said is, a verifiable suspension so we can then have a discussion. And you know the proposal that we put down to the Iranians has a lot of ideas in it about how they can meet their enrichment needs in a way that would reassure the international community that is not a route to a nuclear weapon. That would be a subject of the negotiations.

Q: I just want to make sure I'm clear. It could be a temporary suspension. That is what you're saying would be okay, and that would --

MR. HADLEY: Look, you know, what we've said is a verifiable suspension so that talks can get started. And that's what we have in mind. There is an issue of, on a permanent basis, what happens to the enrichment activity that Iran is doing, and that is an issue that is addressed in the proposal we all put down to the Iranians. I'm not trying to make news here. I don't think there's any news here. It always was a verifiable suspension.

Q: On a temporary basis?

MR. HADLEY: It doesn't say termination, it says suspension — you suspend.

Q: It seems like that's what the Iranians have been saying -- we'll do a two-month suspension or something. And if you're saying that's okay, that's -- maybe Condi has already been making that point.

MR. HADLEY: The point is, the forum for that conversation is Solana and Larajani. And it's very important that we have only one channel of the discussions on these issues. If that is a proposal that the Iranians have, they should make it to Solana, in the conversations with Solana and Larajani so that we can have this conversation.

Q: -- about Abbas, what is the President's message going to be to President Abbas on Wednesday (September 20)? And is he going to be open to the idea of restarting some kind of financial aid to the Palestinian government?

MR. HADLEY: Look, the framework of the policy is pretty clear. We support voices of moderation. Obviously, President Abbas is one. He's committed to peace, and we have worked with him and would continue to work with him. That's why the President is going to see him. The big question, of course, is whether Hamas will renounce violence, accept the existence of Israel, and accept the agreements that have been made. That's the \$64 question. And we hope they would.

MS. PERINO: Since we're about to land, I'm going to cut this off, and we'll try to catch up later today if you need anything else.

END 11:23 A.M. EDT

(end transcript)

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